

VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

YESTERDAY & TO-DAY



COMMUNITY HEALTH CELL

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PREFACE

A study on the history, roles and related aspects of Voluntary Development Organisations in India was carried out by PRIA in the last 3-4 years. Future body of the report and an annotated Bibliography has been published by PRIA. In order to facilitate the dissemination of the findings from the study, a popular report has been prepared in Hindi. Its illustrated popular version of the key findings of the study in English is intended to not only provide the basis for reflection by the activists and their organisations but also to create an opportunity for sharing such insights at the grassroot level.

The illustrations in this document have been prepared by Avinash Deshpandey and the text has been compiled by Rajesh Tandon.

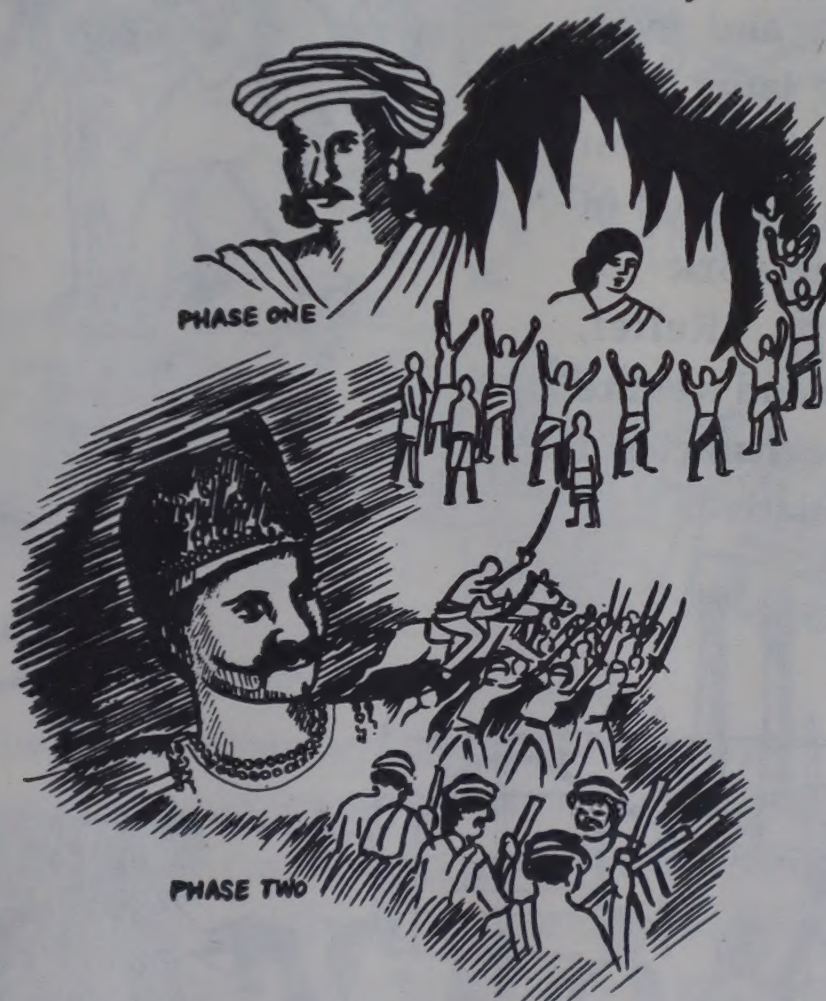
Context

Voluntary initiatives by ordinary citizens have existed throughout human society. In different periods of history and in different societies, they take different forms and expressions. They represent the response of ordinary citizens to improve situations and conditions of living around them in their societies. Thus voluntary initiatives contribute to the processes of social change as perceived by its initiators in that historical context.

Voluntary Development Organisations in our country are a more modern manifestation of such initiatives. Their relevance and contributions are being increasingly recognised in the contemporary society. Hence, it becomes important to briefly trace the history, the roles and other aspects of the functioning and challenges of such voluntary development organisations in India today. The findings described in this document refer to only those voluntary development organisations which are outside the purview of party politics, religious activities and radical militant movements and groups.

History

Broadly speaking, the history of voluntary development organisations in our country can be traced to the past two centuries. Phase-One represents the first half of 19th century characterised by social movements against such social evils as untouchability, child marriage, "sati", etc. The work of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and others the faradi movement and the work of Christian missionaries represented the dominant character of voluntary action during this phase.

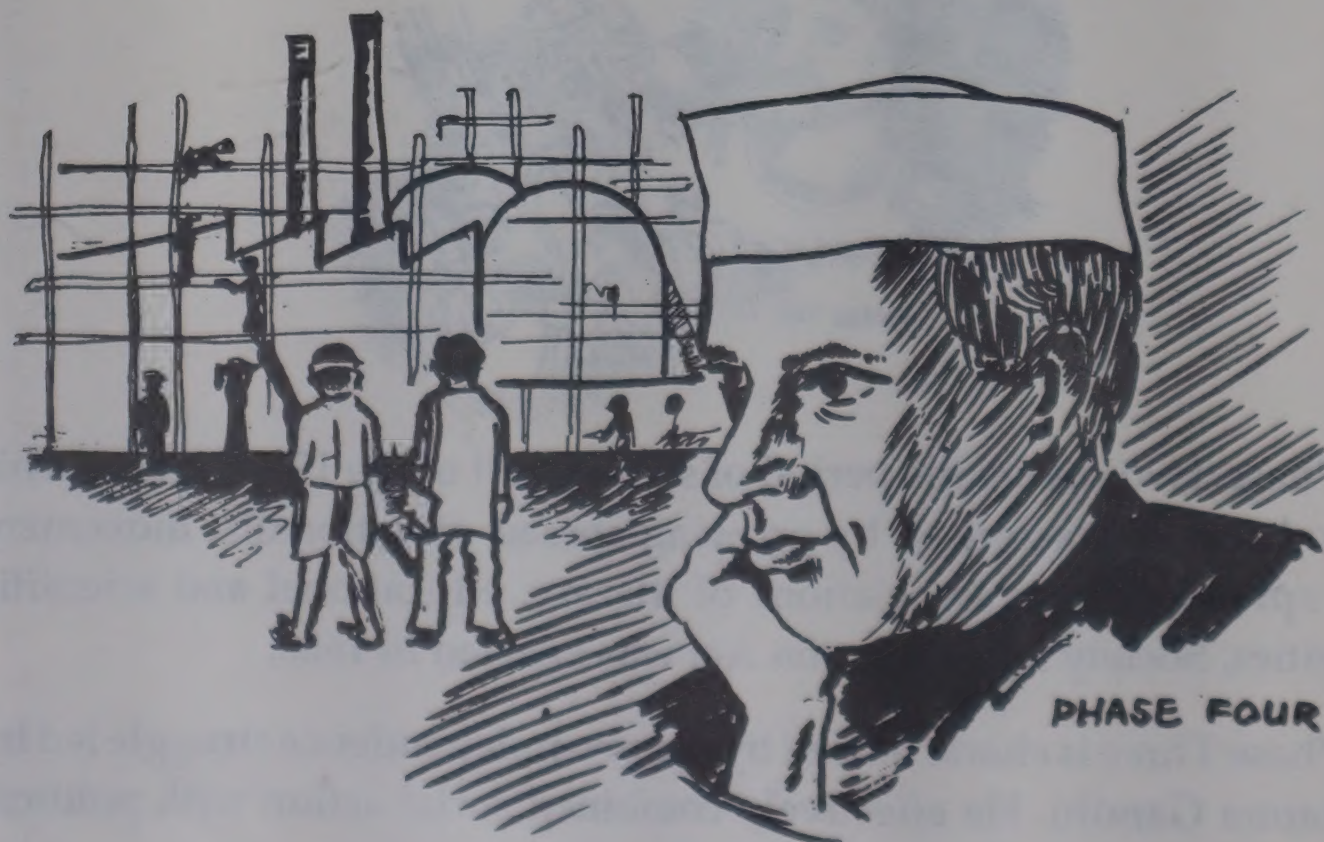
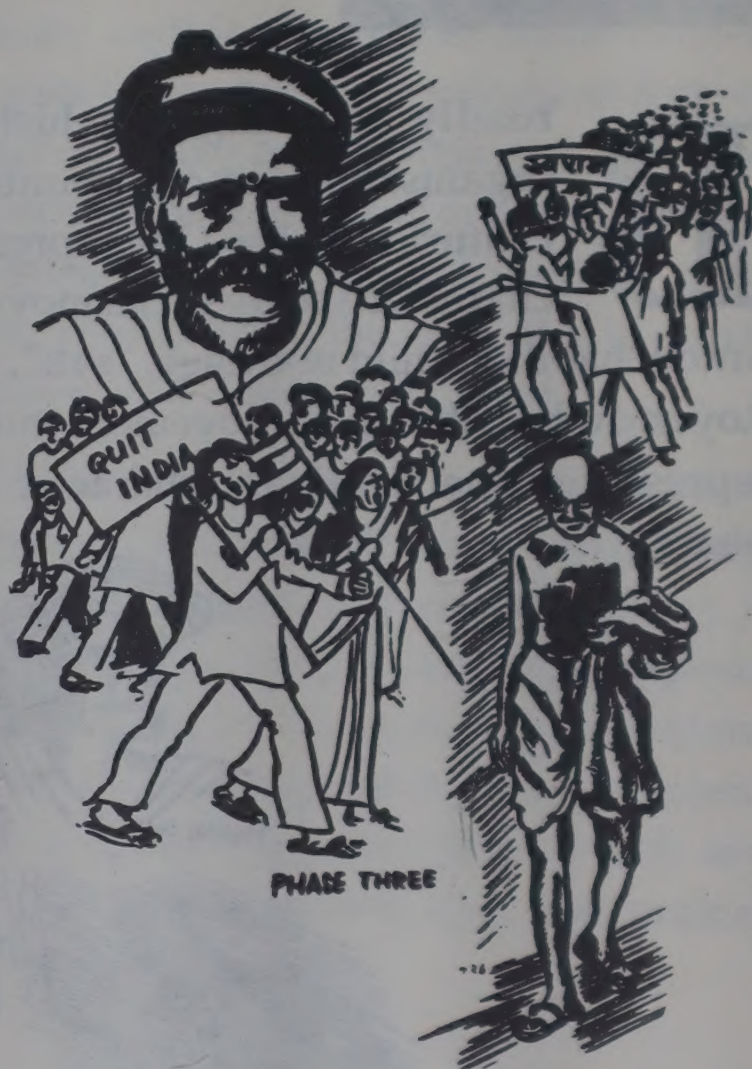


Phase Two covers the period of second half of the 19th century. This period was characterised by growing spread of nationalist movement and spread of new associations of literary, educational and scientific activities, Society's Registration Act was enacted in 1680.

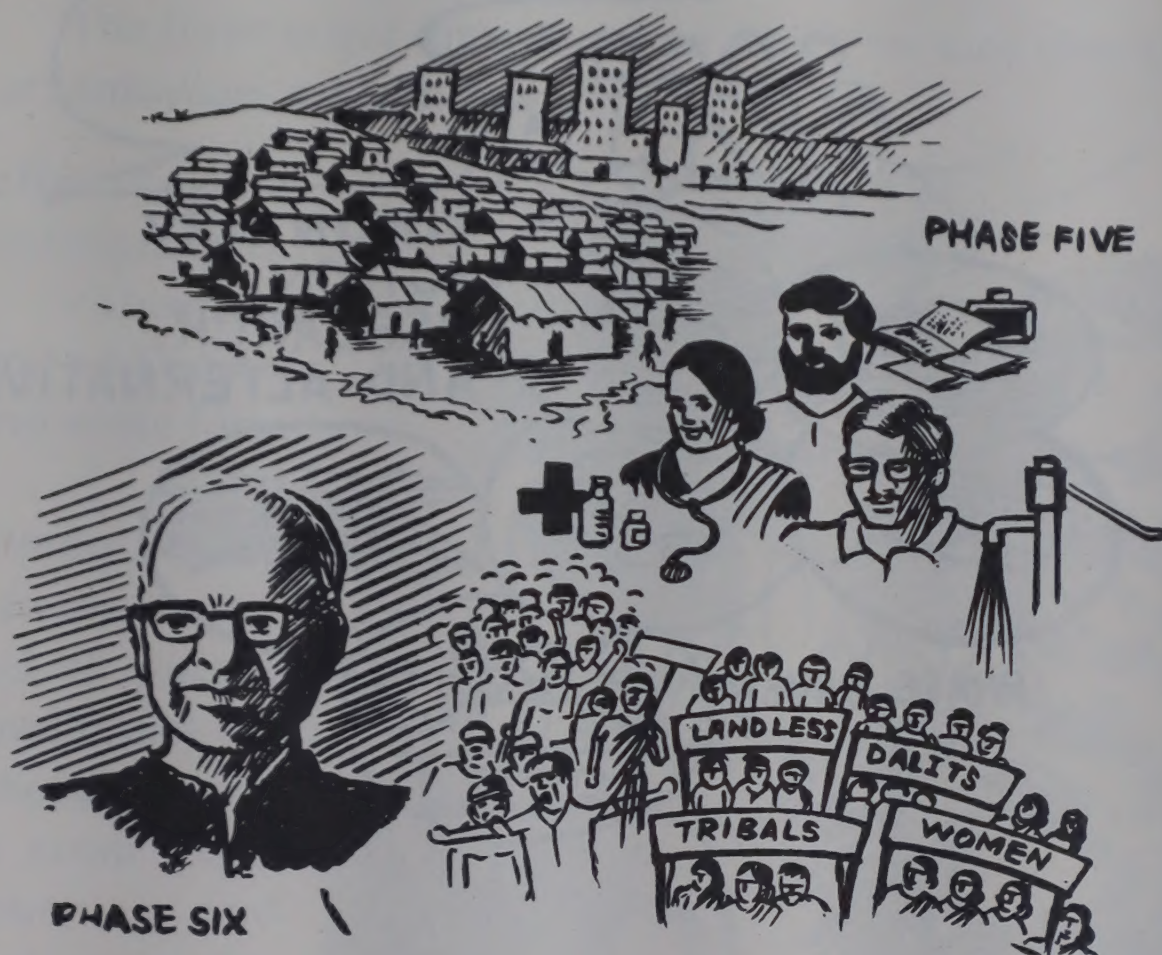
Phase Three is characterised by the pre-independence struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi. He effectively combined social action with political

struggle. The movement for constructive social work stimulated by Gandhiji during this phase lead to emergence of many initiatives throughout the country.

Phase Four can be seen as the two initial decades of independence. This was the period when the Government took upon itself the primary responsibility for development, and even started giving large scale grants to Gandhian organisations engaged in constructive work for development. Relief, rehabilitation and welfare dominated the character of voluntary initiatives.



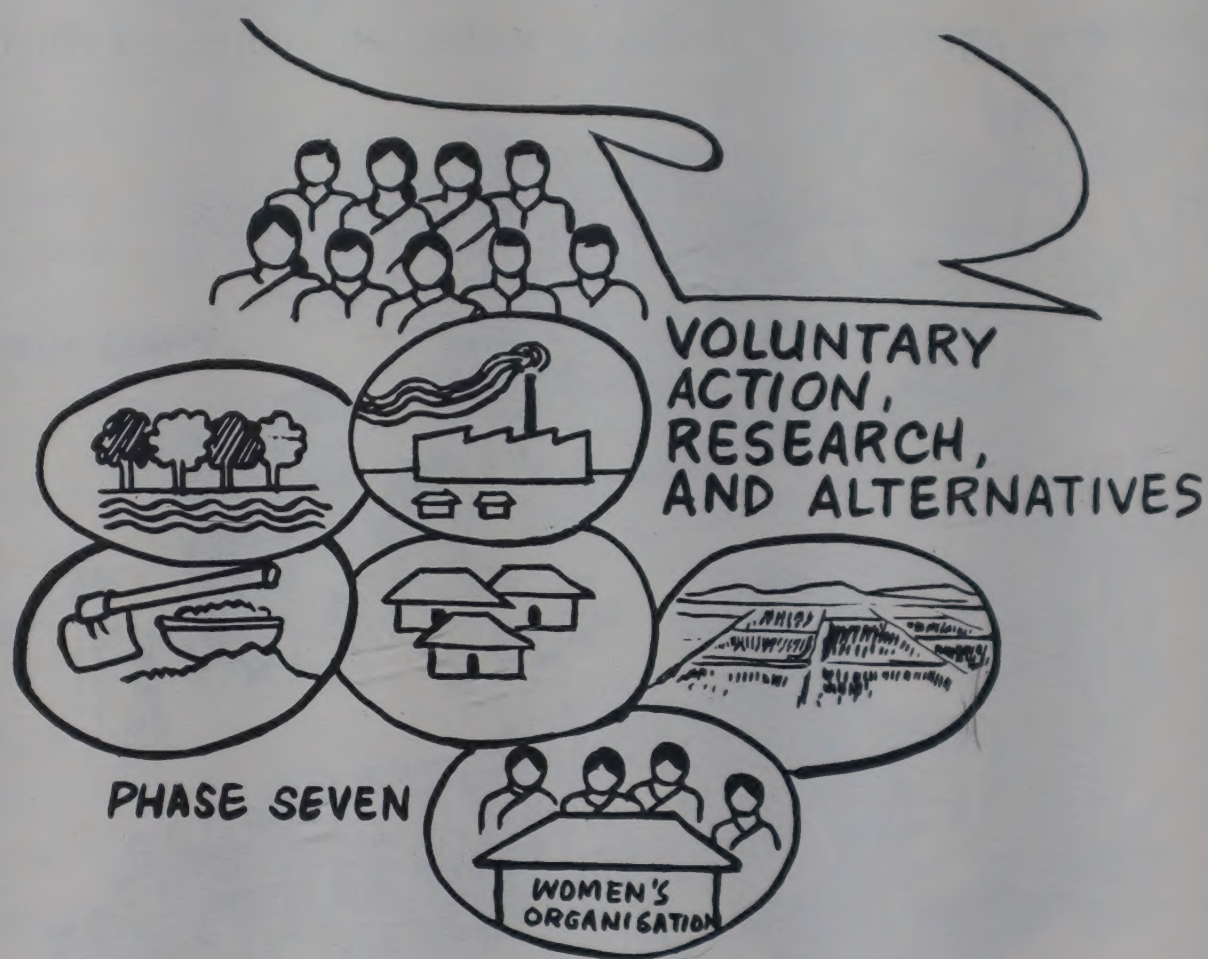
The failure of the dominant policies of the Government began to show by late 60's. A new generation of voluntary organisations began to experiment with alternative and integrated rural development programmes during this phase (Phase Five). Experiments in education, health care, agriculture, drinking water, etc. emerged during this period.



Phase Six can be characterised by the period of emergency and the J.P. movement. A large number of young people came out of this movement after the Janata Government came to power in Delhi and set up voluntary initiatives throughout the country. It became clear to them that merely changing the label of political party would not bring about the desired change in the society. Late 70's thus characterised the growth of a substantial number of new initiatives by those who are part of the social, youth and student movements of the 70's.

The last decade can be seen to characterise a new phase where different types of activities take research training policy influencing on diverse issues like women, environment, legal aid etc. began to develop

in the country. A new generation of professionally trained young people entered this field in this Phase Seven.



Thus the history of the rise, growth and changes in the roles and character of voluntary development organisations in India is quite complex and dynamic as illustrated above.

What has been the history of such initiatives in your own district?

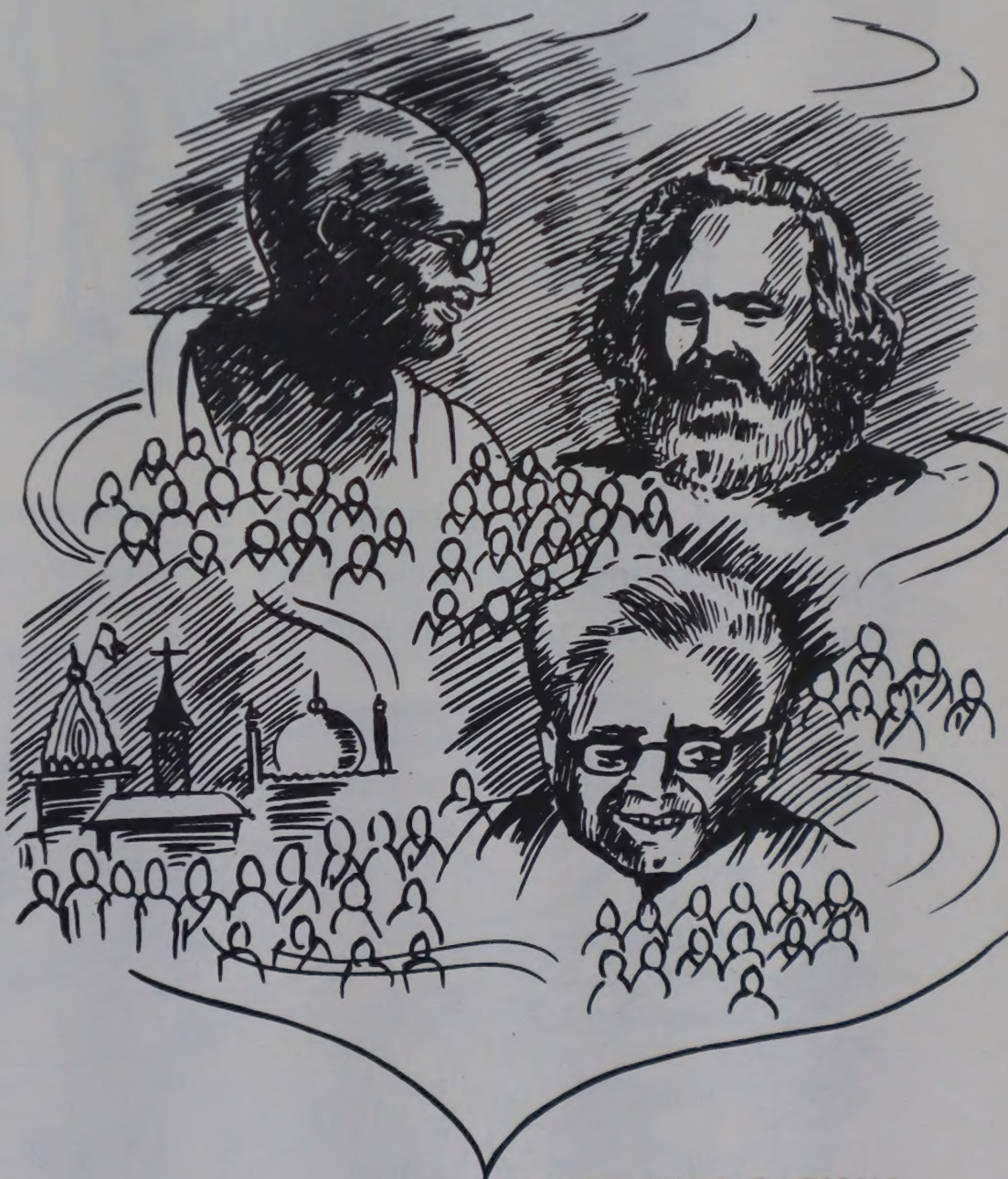
What has been the history of voluntary organisations within the area of your work in the past few decades?

Typology

It is difficult to classify the work of voluntary development organisations in a simple manner.

The three major dimensions on which we may classify these organisations are as below.

The first one is the nature of inspiration. As voluntary organisations represent some form of social commitment, many of its founders are inspired to pursue this commitment. For some, the inspiration comes from their religious and spiritual roots, for others, philosophers and historical leaders have been the source of the inspiration. Gandhi, Marx, J.P. are clearly major influences in the Indian context.



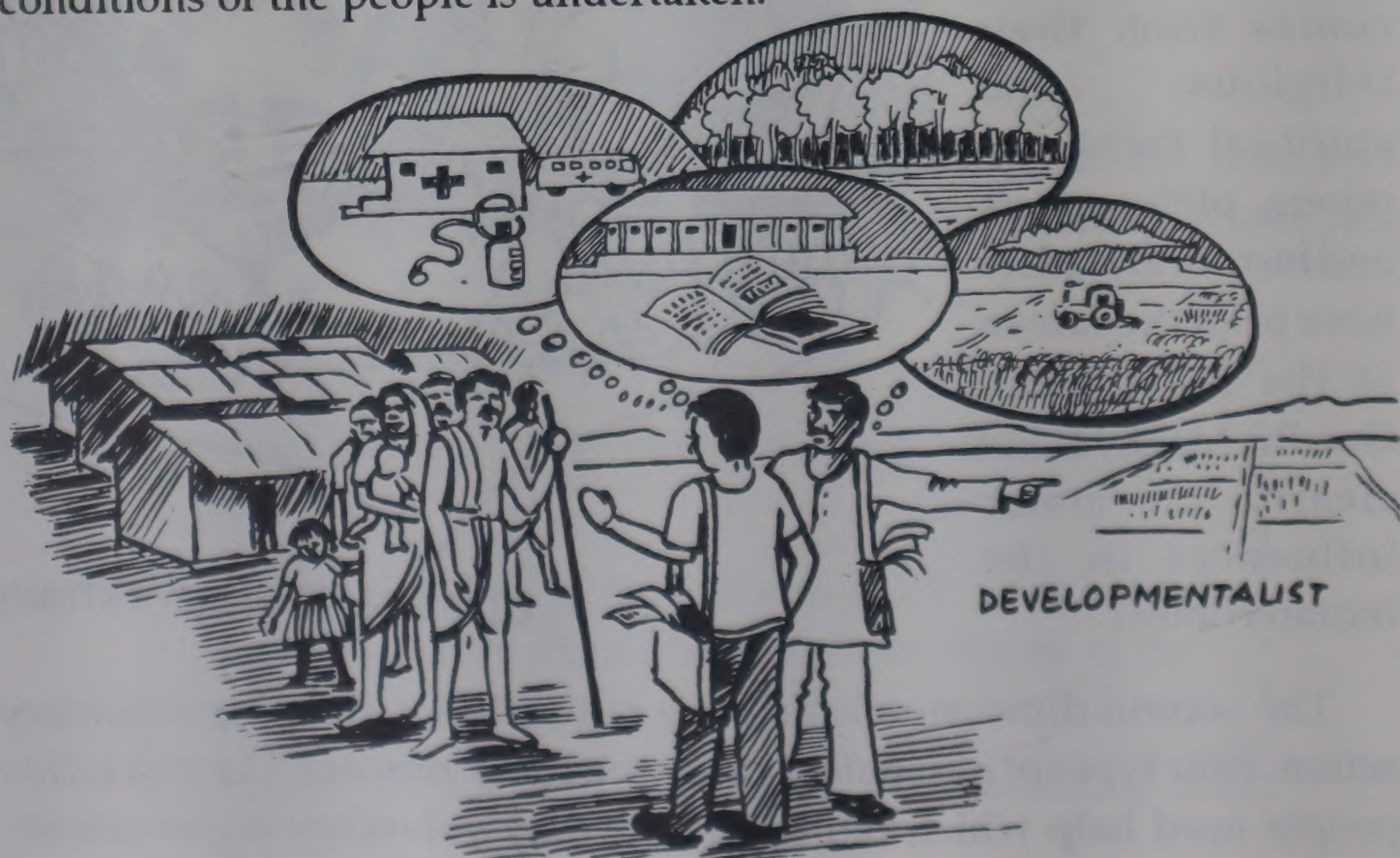
DIFFERENT INSPIRATIONS

The second dimension is the very rationale for initiating voluntary action. Four types of rationales can be seen at the moment. The first is that people need help which can be provided by voluntary organisations.

This rationale become the basis of welfare and charity-oriented work.



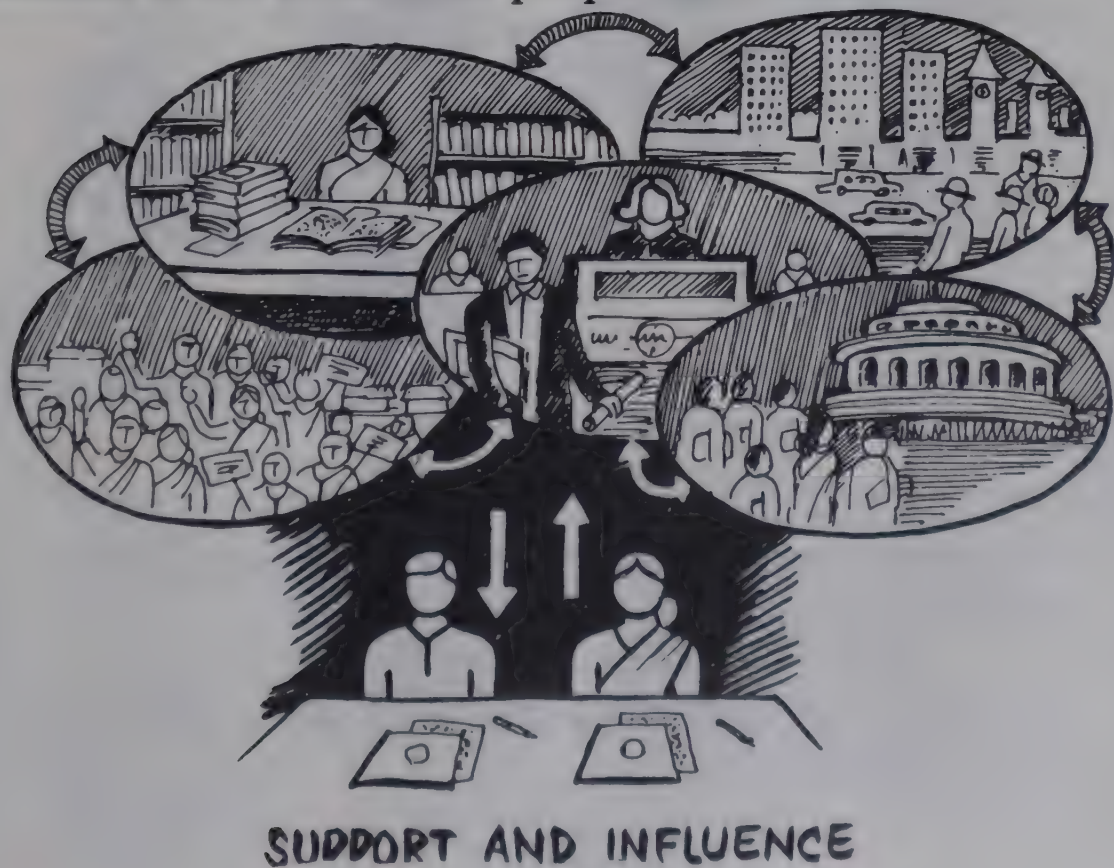
Second rationale is essentially a developmentalist one, in which experimentation with new ways of improving the socio-economic conditions of the people is undertaken.



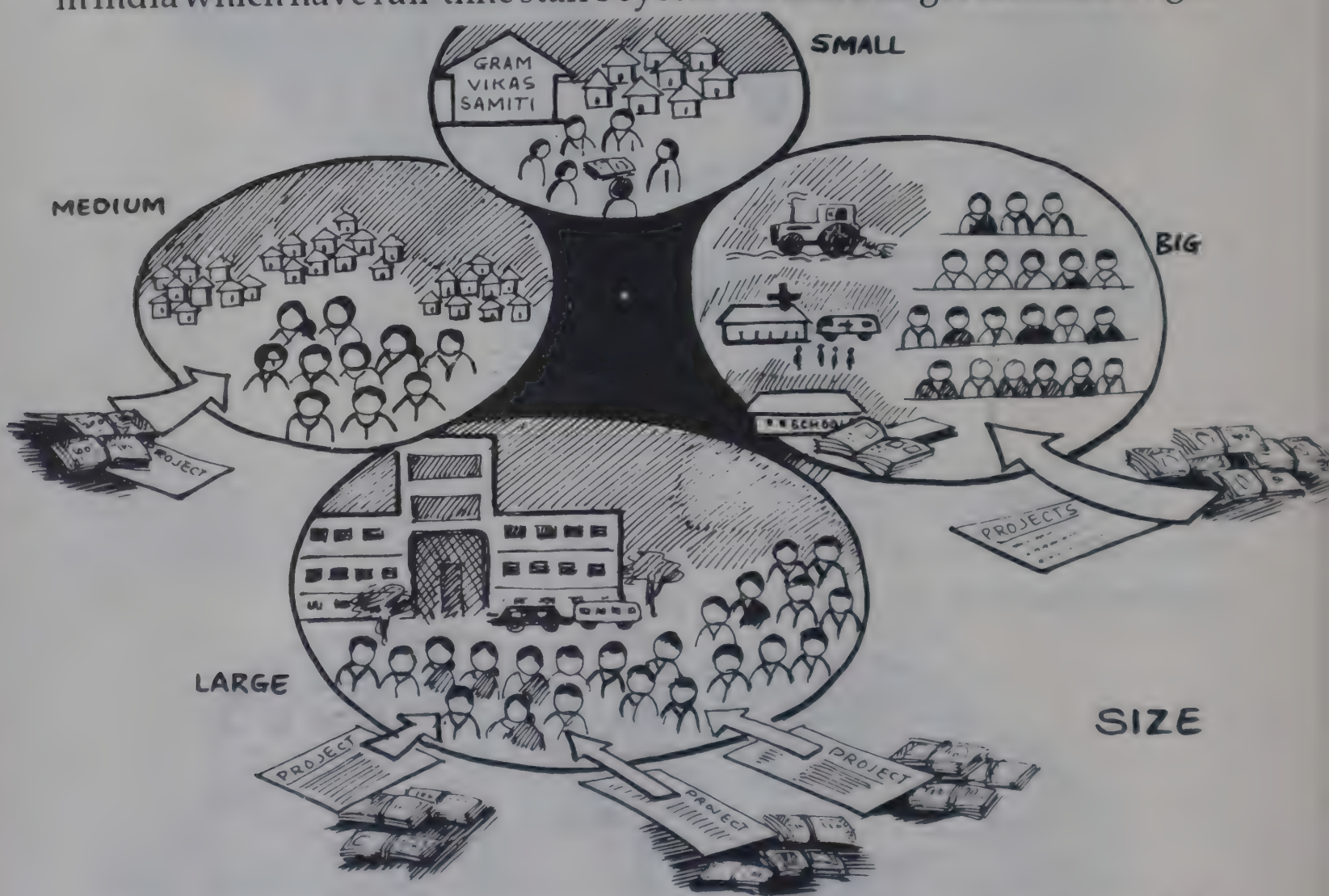
The third rationale is to empower the people through conscientisation and organisation building and such that they can work towards their own improvement.



The fourth rationale is to carry out supportive and advocacy activities from the local to the international levels such that the conditions for improvements in the lives of the people are created.



The third dimension on which voluntary organisations vary is the size. Most voluntary organisations in our country are predominantly very small operating with part-timers and volunteers in a small cluster of villages or slums. The medium size organisations have a few full-timers and some project grants to carry out their activities. The third category is of big organisations in the range of about 50 full-time staff and a regular programme budget. There are very few very large voluntary organisations in India which have full-time staff beyond 100 and a larger annual budget.



Obviously, other dimensions as also a different combinations of the above also emerge in reality.

What has been your experience of various types of voluntary organisations in your area?

Do you find them differing from each other on some other basis?

Relations With the State

Relations between voluntary organisations and other segments of environment have become important in recent years. The most significant set of relations exist with the State and its various dimensions. The State firstly plays the role of regulating organisations in the society. So we have various laws governing the functioning of voluntary organisations. These include registration laws, financial laws and laws related to service provision of staff.

In our country, the state has also played a very active funding role of voluntary organisations right from independence. KVIC, CSWB, CAPART etc. are examples of the same.

Thirdly, the state also has taken upon itself the major role for promoting

RELATIONS WITH STATE



development in the country. As a result, the Government programmes of all dimensions of development exist in the country. This creates the situation where the model of development proposed by the Government programmes is in many situations in contradiction to that being implemented by voluntary organisations.

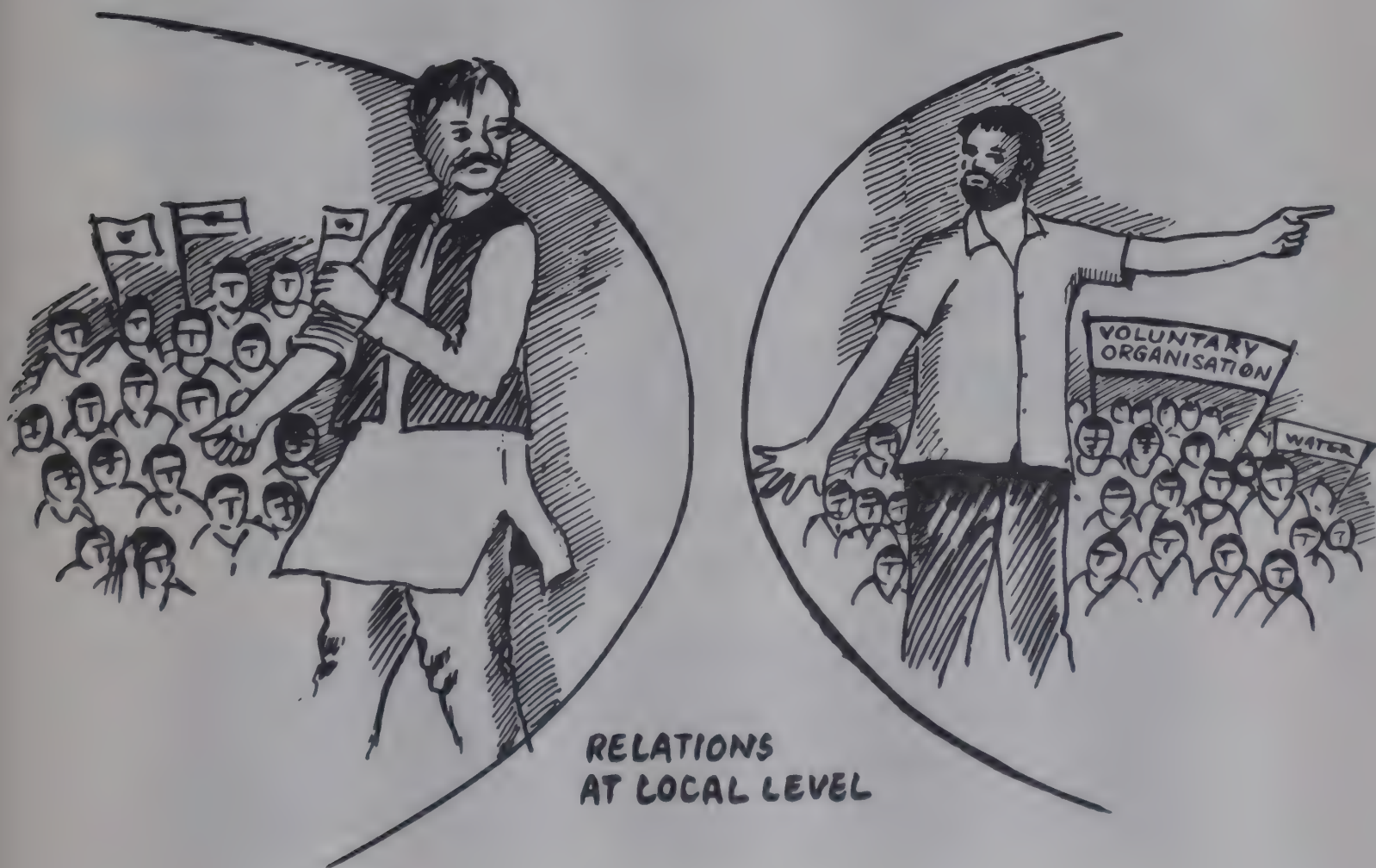
The experience of many organisations in different periods of history has been that the state has attempted to control and regulate voluntary development organisations either through tightening of legislations, or through providing (or withholding) of funds, or by rejecting the models of development practiced by voluntary organisations. The state makes particular efforts to regulate those voluntary organisations which challenge its programmes and approaches or which attempt to empower the people.

What has been your experience of relating with Government and its various agencies? In which ways this relationship has been a hindrance or useful to your work?

Relations with Political Parties

With the parliamentary democracy as the form of government, multiple political parties have existed in the country. Many times voluntary organisations kept aloof from party politics and, therefore, only maintained distance from them. However, political parties do have an impact on the work of voluntary organisations to various degrees and in different ways. Many a times the work of voluntary organisations exposes the leaders of various political parties in the eyes of the people. This inevitably causes discomfort in ruling parties.

Cadre based parties sometimes find themselves at the local level in competition with the work of voluntary organisations and, therefore, tensions and conflicts arise at that level.

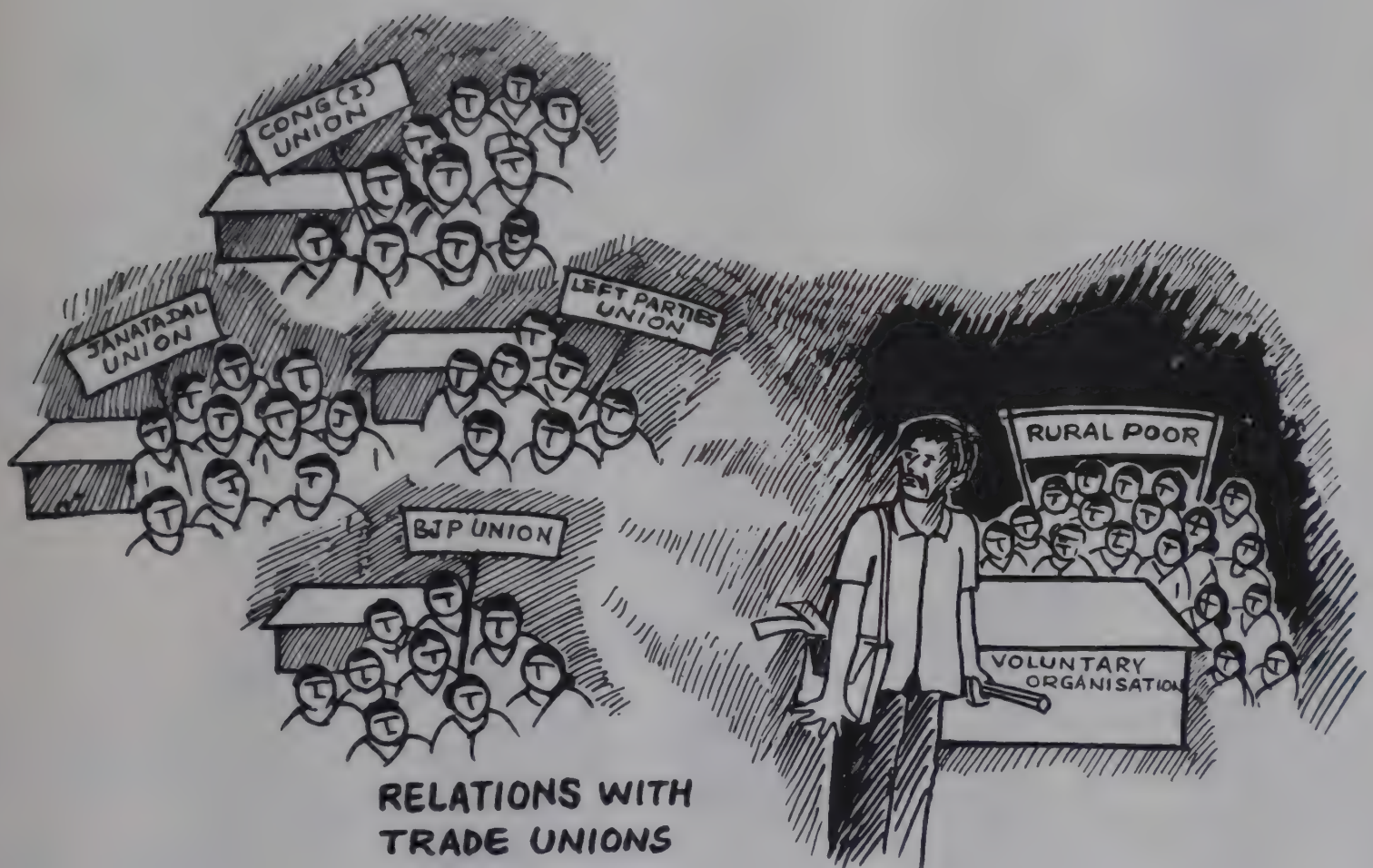




What has been your experience of local political parties in your area?

Relations with Trade Unions

Relations with Trade Unions are essentially an extension of the relationship with political parties. This is so because most trade unions historically have been closely affiliated with most political parties.

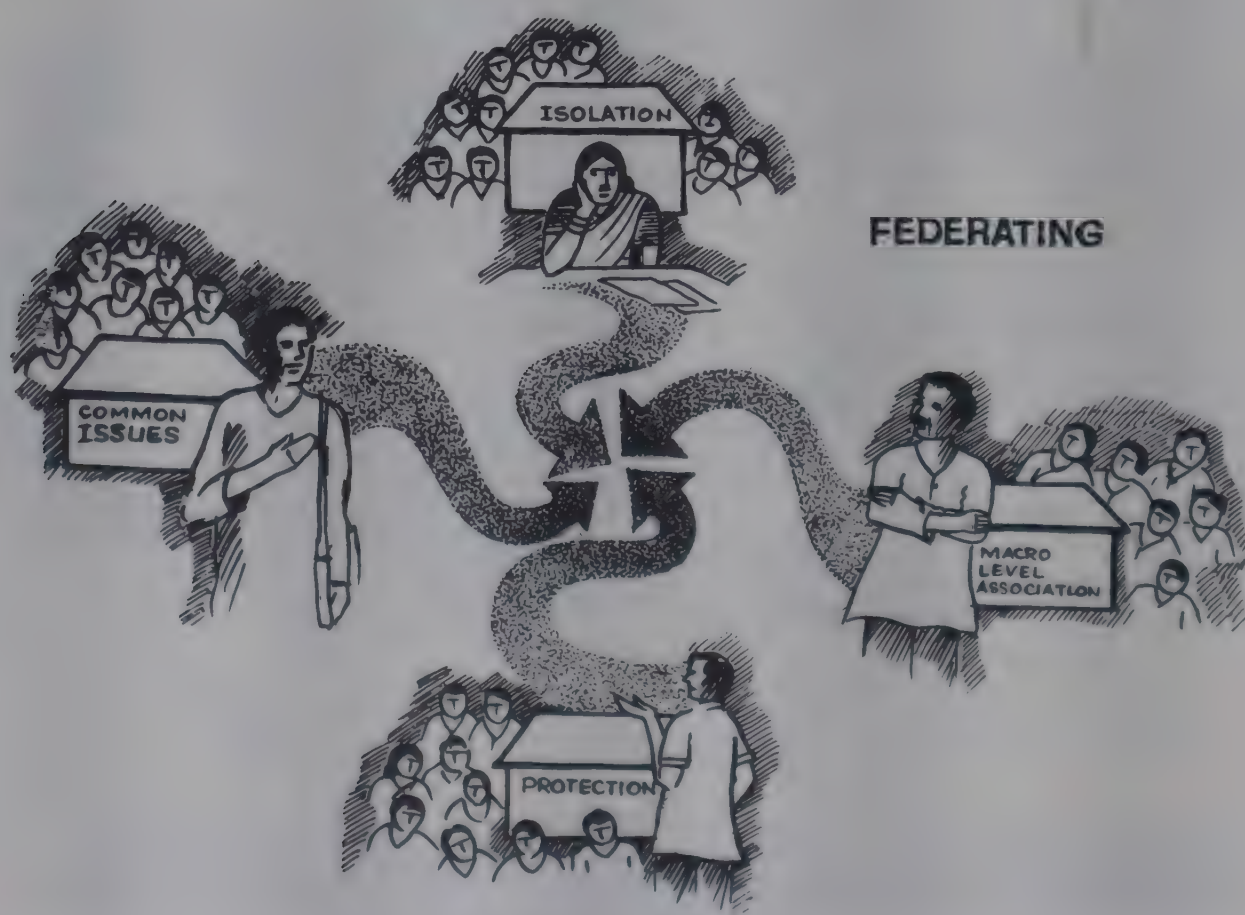


What has been your experience in this regard?

Have you ever related with a local trade union and with what results?

Federating

Relations with other voluntary organisations at the local and national levels have also been a significant dimension of the current situation. Attempts to federate with others have been made at different times. Formal associations and federations have been set up at the district, state or national levels. Issue-based and informal networks have been established to pursue common goals. One of the main reasons for associating with others is the overall solidarity and protection of each other. Coming together to common issues can also be a useful vehicle for influencing policies and legislations. However, there have been many difficulties in actual running of various associations, federations and networks.

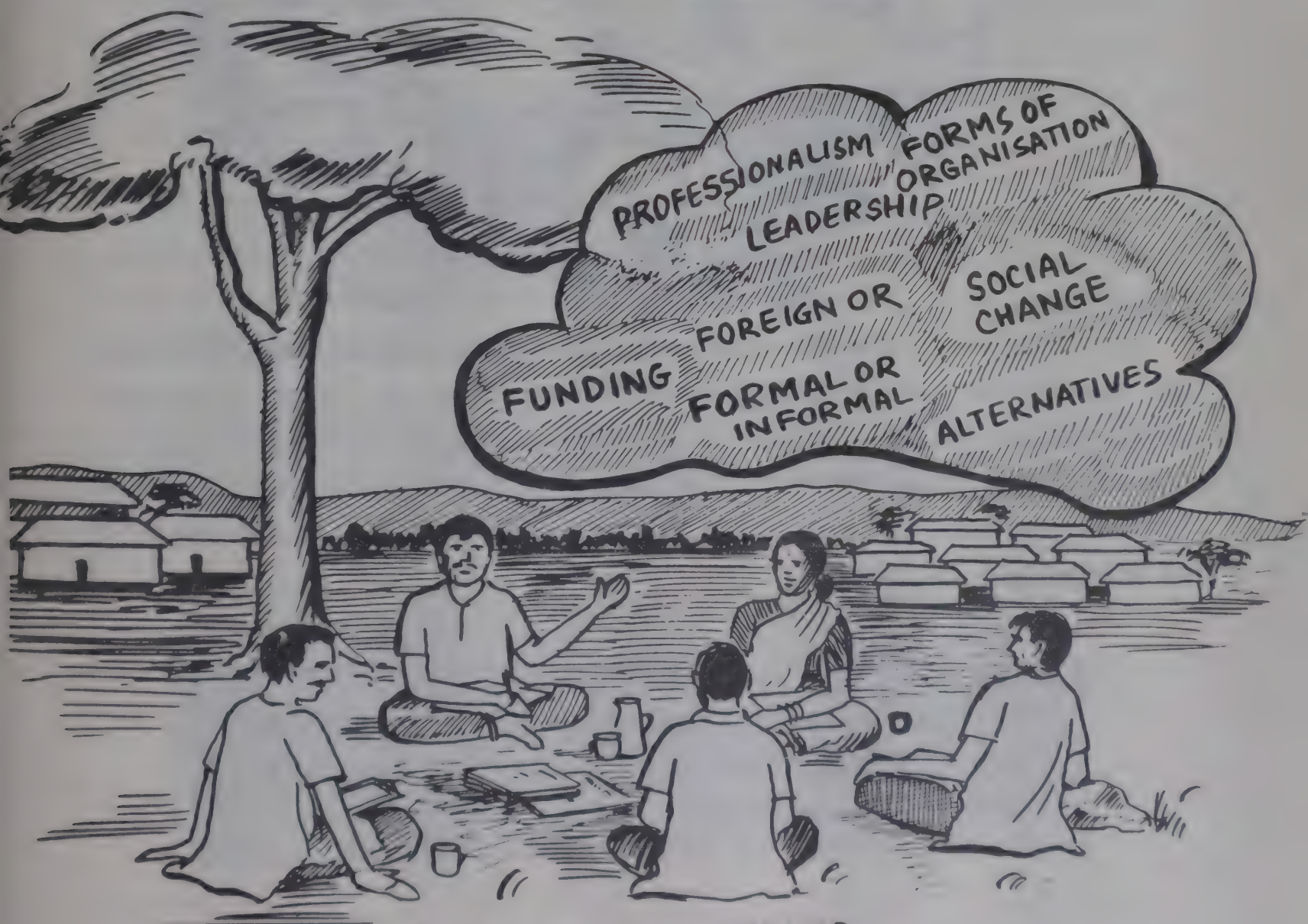


What has been your experience of networking and associating with others at the district, state or national levels? How can this be improved?

Organisational Issues

Voluntary development organisations have also been experiencing many issues within their organisations. One set of such issues relate to funding. Stability and continuity of funding is a problem which results in various tensions and conflicts in the organisation.

The institutionalisation and longevity of such organisations has been an issue since many voluntary organisations are founded by charismatic leaders and find it difficult to continue with the same level of commitment and contribution after the departure of such leaders.



ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES

Roy and others the faradi movement and the work of Christian missionaries

ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES



In recent years, another issue related to professional competence of the staff of the voluntary organisations has come up. When voluntary organisations undertake new programmes and activities which require technical and professional competence, it becomes a difficult challenge for the organisations to attract, retain and train people to match the level of competence required.

What are some of the organisational issues you are experiencing? What solutions have you found to deal with these issues?

Influencing Public Policy

The work of voluntary organisations has significantly affected government programmes and policies on different aspects of development in the country. Some of this has happened without voluntary organisations intending to do so. Experiments created by voluntary organisations in areas of education, health, drinking water etc. were adopted by the government as part of its own policies and programmes on the basis of the merit of these experiments.

Therefore, influencing public policy as a deliberate step is only a recent phenomenon. In this regard there are two different routes which are being taken. One route is to influence the key decision makers at the state or central level by introducing innovative ideas to them. This is where influencing bureaucrats and ministers is undertaken.

The second route is to influence policy through organised interest groups. This is where people's own organisations and movements are strengthened to take the initiative to influence media, public opinion, political parties, governments etc.

During the last decade, another route to influence public policies has been through using public interest litigation. This has opened up the space for use of judiciary in support of people's issues.

What has been your experience in influencing public policies? Have you done so deliberately? What has been the result of the same?

ABOUT US

Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), New Delhi is an educational support organisation, which works with activists, individuals, grass root groups and organisations so as to strengthen their capacities in the areas of participatory research, participatory training and evaluation, and organisation building and help them deepen their understanding of the issues they are working on.

In the last ten years of its existence, PRIA has focussed on wide-ranging issues such as adult non-formal education, problems of deforestation, land alienation and large dams, women and work, women and sanitation, occupational health hazards and management issues of NGOs. In the coming years PRIA'S focus would be on looking at issues of women's empowerment, people's access to control over natural resources, occupational safety, workers' education and enhancing competencies of activists and groups in individual and organisational areas.



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